



Vietnam POWs take final flight aboard "Hanoi Taxi"

By Tech. Sgt. Charlie Miller
445th AW/PA

Members of the Air Force Reserve 445th Airlift Wing had the distinct honor of interacting with about 120 former POWs May 5 and 6. The men were invited by the wing to Wright-Patterson for a re-enactment of the 1973 flights that took the men from brutal communist-run prison camps to oppression free democratic political independence.

All of the former POWs were flown out of North Vietnam on C-141s. The 445th had the honor of flying these heroes in the "Hanoi Taxi" on the plane's last true airlift mission. The POWs were joined by Secretary of the Air Force Michael W. Wynne.

It was February 12, 1973 and the long conflict was finally at an end. The C-141 Starlifter, painted white with its Red Cross tail flash, picked up the first 40 POWs. The men waited quietly and patiently, they had vowed to show no emotion to their North Vietnamese captors.

They boarded the aircraft, took their seats and prepared for takeoff. As soon as the Starlifter's wheels left the runway, a resounding cheer went up from all on board. They were finally free. Clark Air Base, The Philippines was their first stop before going back home to the U.S.

In all, over 500 POWs were flown out of Vietnam on C-141s during "Operation Homecoming."



U.S. Air Force photo by TSgt Rick Storza, 4th Combat Camera

Former POW's, from the left, Captain Arv Chauncy, U.S. Navy (retired), Captain Ed Estes, U.S. Navy (retired), and Colonel Bob Barnett, U.S. Air Force (retired), let out a cheer as the C-141C they're aboard takes off from Wright-Patterson AFB during a POW reunion and remembrance flight.

Secretary Wynne flew with the first group and spoke at the ceremony to all attendees before the second group's flight.

"Because of your efforts we remain a free country today," the secretary said. "Your courage and sacrifice set the pace. This is the story of freedom, a story that will transcend this aircraft's life. Our airmen today could do no better than to just follow your lead. As Secretary of the Air Force and as a grateful citizen, welcome home, again."

Most of the POWs had not been on a C-141 since the 70's. The interior of the plane was set up to look close to the way it did in 1973 when the men were first airlifted home.

On board before take off, there was time of storytelling between the men and time to view the dozens of pictures throughout the plane. Only the POWs themselves could tell the stories that exist behind those pictures. Some of the

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**C-141 Dedication Prayer
May 5, 2006**

By Chaplain (Maj.) Bill Dickens
445th Airlift Wing Chaplain

Father God, we stand in awe of Your goodness and faithfulness which is manifested to us daily. May You continue to bless our country and strengthen our resolve to do what is right.

We are gathered here tonight to honor and remember. Tail number 177 is a complex collection of wires, metal, and fluids molded together to create a venerable flying machine. Yet, she represents so much more. She represents the resolve of a nation. She represents a commitment to leave no one behind. She represents the compassion to care for those who are wounded and suffering. She represents the hard work and ingenuity of those who kept her full and flying. She represents the bravery of her crewmembers.

Yet, she also represents the sacrifice of those who would make their final trip home draped by our nation's flag. She represents planes that have borne freedom to every continent on this globe. We thank You for the protection You have afforded these planes and her passengers.

Father, there are those who are not with us tonight, we have labeled them as MIAs, but we know that they are not beyond Your sight or reach. Wherever they are, may they rest in Your care. Give to their families, what Your Word calls, "the peace that surpasses all understanding."

We remember those who are in harm's way in Iraq and Afghanistan. Please shield them, keep them safe, help them accomplish their mission and bring them home soon. We ask You to meet the needs of their loved ones, what they may be.

Guide and bless the events of tonight and tomorrow. May they be pleasing to You. In Your name we pray. Amen.

The true legacy of the Starlifter

By Col. Brian Dominguez
445th Vice Commander

Singer/Song-
w r i t e r
Johnny Cash had a huge hit with "I've Been Everywhere, Man." He very well could've been referring to the C-141 Starlifter,



Colonel Dominguez

whose last years were flown with all of us in the wing. From Ramstein to Baghdad to Antigua to Sigarella to Christchurch to Antarctica to Hickam to Diego Garcia to Kadena to Buenos Aires to Mogadishu to Cairo, the Starlifter and its crews made an impact wherever they went. Yes indeed, the C-141 was a reliable workhorse, flying almost 11 million hours, finishing her illustrious career airlifting our wounded war fighters out of Iraq. However, the true legacy of the Starlifter lies not in her iron, her engines or her cargo belly, but instead, lies with all the troops who enabled her to fly the mission so successfully.

As Col. Jim Blackman, mission commander on the C-141's last flight, so eloquently noted, the Starlifter was America's preeminent strategic airlifter because of all the hard working troops who went the extra yard to ensure mission success, especially here in the wing.

The C-141 team was truly championship in caliber. The team was comprised of many dedicated professionals including maintainers, who scraped their knuckles in

freezing conditions and sweat buckets in sweltering heat to keep the Starlifter flying. Also on that team were our civil engineers, who patched up runways in distant, austere locations so the C-141 could land, and our aerial porters, whose loading prowess and perseverance enabled the C-141 to deliver the goods. Let's not forget the security forces that guarded over her and the aeromedical crews who worked 24 hour days to ensure the C-141 could bring our wounded home safely. And how about the ASTS troops who helped set-up and run contingency hospitals to provide our fallen soldiers with critical care in the field before being transported to Landstuhl. Remember our intelligence and tactics experts who advised safe ingress and egress routes so the Starlifter could fly another day and the crew dogs whose loyal dedication to the mission forged a special relationship with the C-141 and helped quarterback many a triumphant return.

Another large part of the Starlifter team was our headquarters staff and personnel and medical specialists who worked long and hard to provide our deployed troops and aircrew with the needed support to complete the assigned task. And of course, all our heroic Vietnam POWs graced the Starlifter with dignity with their ultimate flight to freedom.

Yes indeed, the C-141 has been everywhere, but her legacy was written by all of you who have supported and flown the mission. You should all be very proud of the role you have played in making the Starlifter the preeminent airlifter of the jet age!

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POW C-141 Flight

Continued from cover



U.S. Air Force photo by SSgt Hector Garcia, 4th Combat Camera

Secretary of the Air Force Michael W. Wynne (right) and the 445th Airlift Wing Commander Brig. Gen. Bruce E. Davis (left) walk to the rear of the "Hanoi Taxi" to greet former Vietnam POWs during the retirement of the last C-141 in the Air Force.

men looked for pictures of themselves; others identified fellow POWs and described what kind of person he was.

But the stories of finally leaving North Vietnam seemed to hold the most emotion.

"It was unbelievable to see an American airplane out there at the airport in North Vietnam that wasn't getting shot at," said retired Air Force Col. Leroy Stutz, a prisoner for six years and four months. "I wasn't too sure it was going to happen. We are going to miss this plane; it's done a lot of good."

The most emotional part of the event was clearly when the POWs left the plane and had wives and family members rush across the taxiway, some jumping into the arms of their loved ones repeating historical reunions from 23 years ago.

Tears were shed by the POWs, their families and by many in the crowd who gathered to witness a truly astounding moment in history.

"Seeing the POWs and their families has given me a renewed faith in God and country, what our jobs mean to this wing and to the future of the United States."

*-Tech. Sgt Harold "Buck" Rogers
445th Maintenance Squadron*

It's hard to believe that I'd ever be able to do it again," Col. Stutz said. "My wife came out running."

Retired Air Force Maj. Tim Ayers was one of the lucky ones. The major was shot down in an F4E on May 3, 1972 and released on March 28, 1973.

"I spent less than a year in captivity and can't imagine how hard it must have been to live through 6 plus years of it," Maj. Ayers said. "I love to come to the reunions and hear the stories the other guys have to tell."

Certainly all members of the 445th Airlift Wing hope that this POW reunion will be the most memorable reunion ever for the men and their families and they will leave our wing and the C-141 with new stories to tell. They have left each of us too many stories for us to count.

Tech. Sgt. Harold "Buck" Rogers, 445th Maintenance Squadron, summed it up well when he said "Seeing the POWs and their families has given me a renewed faith in God and country, what our jobs mean to this wing and to the future of the United States."

Now the last C-141 aircraft is to be retired, but to the 445th AW and to the POWs who were repatriated aboard the plane, the "Hanoi Taxi" will never stop telling stories and will always be a museum show piece, a center piece, with an unending legacy.



U.S. Air Force photo by TSgt Rick Storza, 4th Combat Camera

Former Air Force POW Lt. Col. Jim Lamar uses his cell phone to photograph a photo of the Hanoi Hilton during a POW reunion remembrance flight on the "Hanoi Taxi."



U.S. Air Force photo by SSgt Hector Garcia, 4th Combat Camera

War memorabilia was displayed during the ceremony.



U.S. Air Force Photo by Tech. Sgt. Charlie Miller



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Larry A. Simmons

Airman 1st Class Humberto Alcocer leads the honor guard during the ceremony, which celebrated the last mission of the C-141 Saturday, May 6, 2006, at the National Museum of the United States Air Force, Dayton, Ohio. Airman Alcocer is a member of the 88th Medical Operations Squadron here. The historic aircraft will be on display at the museum.

The "Hanoi Taxi," the last operational C-141 in the Air Force, prepares for take-off. After 43 years in service, the C-141 Starlifter was retired May 6 to the National Museum of the United States Air Force, Dayton, Ohio. The "Hanoi Taxi" was the first aircraft to bring POWs home from North Vietnam in 1973.

445th says goodbye to an old friend

Tail Number 66-0177 makes its way to National Museum of the U.S. Air Force

By Tech. Sgt. Charlie Miller, 445th AW/PA

A distinguished career came to a finish here May 6. After 43 years and approximately 10.6 million flying hours, the last C-141 Starlifter in the fleet completed its mission, landing at the National Museum of the United States Air Force, its permanent destination.

The C-141, the first jet transport plane to be used by the military, served as the backbone of Strategic Airlift for decades. The plane, responsible for flying entertainer Bob Hope and the USO Shows into South Vietnam, also flew Arizona Senator John McCain out of North Vietnam and the prison he was held in for more than five and a half years.

Fittingly, the last flying C-141, tail number 66-0177, was also the very first American aircraft to land at Gia Lam Airport, Hanoi, North Vietnam February 12, 1973 to pick up prisoners-of-war. Because of that singular honor it was dubbed the "Hanoi Taxi."

About 120 former POWs were honored with a "last flight" aboard the "Hanoi Taxi" May 5, 2006. All of the former POWs were repatriated from North Vietnam in C-141s. Most of the men had not flown on a C-141 in over 30 years. There were tears of fond memories and tears in remembrance of fallen service members on the two flights.

"I never thought I'd live to see this day," said retired Air Force Col. Ben Pollard who was shot down

May 15, 1967 while flying an F105F. He spent almost six years in captivity leaving just days short of his 41st birthday. "I never thought I'd live through being a POW."

Secretary of the Air Force Michael W. Wynne flew with the first group of POWs and spoke at the ceremony to all attendees before the second groups' flight.

"What a great honor to fly in the 'Hanoi Taxi' for the second to last time," Secretary Wynne said. "So we say goodbye to one wonderful airplane. It will now be enshrined at the National Museum of the Air Force. This is going to be one of those aircraft with a legacy that will last forever."

Secretary Wynne lost his older brother in 1966 when he was shot down over North Vietnam.

In attendance were, Lt. Gen. John A. Bradley, Chief of Air Force Reserve, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Washington D.C., and Commander, Air Force Reserve Command, Robins Air Force Base, Ga. as were all three former commanders of the 445th, retired Brig. Gen Paul Cooper, Brig. Gen Rusty Moen, Maj. Gen. Robert Duignan and current commander Brig. Gen. Bruce Davis. Congressman Dave Hobson, who represents Ohio's 7th Congressional District which covers Wright-Patt also attended.

Over time, the plane became a flying museum while continuing its real world missions for the 445th Airlift Wing, U.S. Air Force Reserve, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio. Above its forward



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech.Sgt. Larry A. Simmons

Former POWs, servicemembers and special guests participate in the ceremony at the National Museum of the United States Air Force. The event, which was open to the public, saw the final landing of the C-141 Starlifter, and those who attended had the opportunity to walk through the historic aircraft. Approximately 800 people attended the ceremony Saturday, May 6, 2006.

entrance door is the inscription, "First C-141 to Hanoi." Aircrew headrest covers on the flight deck bear the familiar black-and-white POW/MIA emblem. Dozens of framed photos are mounted on the side bulkheads throughout the cargo compartment showing POWs in Hanoi and aboard the plane bound for freedom. A label on the flight engineers panel simply reads "Hanoi Taxi."

Truly, this has been an emotional time. To say wing members from the ISO dock, to the flying squadrons to the aerial port did not have some level of emotional attachment to the C-141 would certainly be naive.

445th Maintenance Squadron member Technical Sgt. Harold "Buck" Rogers, like many in his squadron and the wing, saw an old friend retire in the C-141.

"You knew it was coming, but it didn't set in until it was really here," the sergeant said. "The public sees it flying but doesn't see the day-to-day inspections with every inch of the plane being checked. The safety of the crew and passengers is not just a quick look at the plane, put in some gas and send it on its way."

Sergeant Rogers said he felt honored to be the last dedicated C-141 crew chief. The sergeant marshaled in the "Hanoi Taxi" directing the pilots, Gen. Ducan McNabb, AMC Commander, Lt. Gen. John Bradley, Air Force Reserve Commander, and retired Maj. Gen. Ed Mechenbier on where to park the aircraft after it landed on its final flight from

Wright-Patt to the National Museum of the United States Air Force.

There was a tribute dinner on the evening of May 5 attended by hundreds of wing members, most of the POWs and their families, base personnel, retirees and others. Close to 1,300 people enjoyed a full evening of celebrating the proud history of the C-141 with the "Hanoi Taxi" a few feet away.

A local Dayton television did several live broadcasts and Senior Master Sgt. John Wheeler, an 89th Airlift Squadron flight engineer, was married at the tail of the plane, one of the most unique events of the evening.

The plane, which was parked just outside the hanger doors, was open and hundreds of people took pictures and toured it throughout the evening.

Perhaps the 356th Airlift Squadrons Master Sergeant Herb Nicholson said it best when he surmised, "This doesn't have to be such a somber occasion; she's just going to heaven."

Now that the "Hanoi Taxi" is officially retired from flying, the National Museum of the United States Air Force will soon place it on display. At first, it will be outside where wing members and the public can view the exterior only.

In time, the plane will be moved inside the museum and opened up so all may come aboard and experience a remarkable aircraft.



A weekend to remember



U.S. Air Force Photo by Capt. Doug Sellars

Wing members salute the "Hanoi Taxi" before its final flight May 6.



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Rick Sforza

Tech. Sgt. Phil Probst, a flight engineer from the 89th Airlift Wing, climbs over the top of the "Hanoi Taxi" while performing a preflight check.



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Rick Sforza

The "Hanoi Taxi" during its final flight Saturday, May 6.



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Rick Sforza

Former POW Col. Chuck Tyler, right, USAF retired, shows Maj. Jim Marrott, USAF retired, a pair of handcuffs he smuggled out of the Hanoi Hilton.

Thank you to all the volunteers!



U.S. Air Force Photo by Capt. Doug Sellars

The last flight crew for the C-141 stands in honor of the "Hanoi Taxi" Saturday, May 6.



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Rick Sforza



Then...

A photo on the bulkhead of the "Hanoi Taxi" (above) shows POW Navy Lt. Cmdr. Ed Davis during his repatriation flight when he smuggled a puppy on board. Davis (below) relives the moment during a flight on the same aircraft May 5.

... and Now



U.S. Air Force photos by Tech. Sgt. Rick Sforza



U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Hector Garcia

Above: K. Price Randel unveils the C-141 painting he did and presents it to retired Maj. Gen. Charles D. Metcalf, the museum director, during the C-141 turnover ceremony at the National Museum of the United States Air Force.

Left: Master Sgt. Henry Harlow says it was an emotional day as he makes his way in front of the "Hanoi Taxi" to marshal the aircraft out for its final flight Saturday, May 6.

Newcomers

Welcome to the following reservists, recently assigned to the 445th AW:

Maj. James Allen, 445 AES
 TSgt Timothy Coleman, 445 MXS
 TSgt Brock Felgenhauer, 445 AMXS
 TSgt David Mashburn, 445 LRS
 TSgt John Murphy, 445 CES
 SSgt Joseph Bonner, 445 CES
 SSgt John Brinker, 445 SFS
 SSgt Robert Eubanks, 445 CES
 SSgt Russell Hippensteel, 89 AS
 SSgt Adrian Jones, 445 MXS
 SSgt Matthew Wood, 445 CES
 SrA Johnthan Barns, 445 SFS
 SrA Mary Doucette, 445 ASTS
 SrA Arrica Elliott, 445 SFS
 SrA Jeremy McCleese, 445 CES
 SrA Angela Wilson, 445 ASTS
 A1C Chad Sears, 445 AMXS
 A1C Matthew Wood, 445 AMXS
 Amn Robert Corn, 445 AES
 Amn Thomas Wilson, 445 AMXS
 AB Michael Leek, 87 APS

Awards

Congratulations to the following 445th AW members who recently earned awards.

Meritorious Service Medal

Maj. Michael Baker, 445 OSS
 Maj. Nathaniel Ward, Jr., 89 AS
 MSgt Blaine Bermel, Jr., 445 OSS
 MSgt Holis Carr, 445 ASTS
 MSgt David Goins, 445 MOS
 TSgt Raymond Carson, 445 CES
 TSgt Brett Snelling, 87 APS
 TSgt Elizabeth White, 87 APS

Air Force Commendation Medal

TSgt Brian Algeo, 445 SFS
 TSgt Mark Fellows, 445 AMDS
 TSgt Greg Myers, 445 SFS
 SSgt Michael Carley, 445 SFS
 SSgt Troy Johe, 445 SFS

Promotions

Congratulations to the following personnel, recently promoted to the rank indicated.



Airman

Christopher Judd, 89 AS
 Brandon Vance, 445 CES



Airman First Class

Timothy Flannery, 445 AW
 Nicholas Klepper, 445 MOS
 Sierra Lagard, 445 AMDS
 Tyreese Lewis, 445 LRS
 Asa Myers, 445 MXS
 Alisha Tauge, 445 ASTS



Senior Airman

John Stedham, 445 AMXS
 Dusty Grimes, 445 CES
 Asia Jones, 445 MOS
 Joshua Ruckel, 87 APS



Staff Sergeant

Donald Briggs, 445 ASTS
 William Burdick, 445 AMXS
 Adam Craig, 445 AMXS
 Charles Crawford, 445 CES
 Kelli Filson, 445 CES
 Jason Fox, 445 MXS
 Richard Johnson, 445 AMXS
 Gregory Kelley, 445 CES
 Tamella Lake, 445 AMDS
 Seth McBurney, 445 CES
 Heather McCaig, 445 MXS
 Brandy Miller, 445 AES
 William Richardson, 445 AES
 Randy Smith, 445 LRS
 Benjamin Toops, 87 APS
 Charlotte Williams, 445 MSF



Technical Sergeant

Molly Blackburn, 445 ASTS
 Bethany Frazier, 445 AMDS
 Judy Gonzales, 445 MXS
 Emanuel Griffin, 445 CES
 Jason Lathem, 445 CES
 Glenn Newhouse, 445 AES
 Jess Pavlovicz, 445 AES
 Tracy Sease, 87 AP



Master Sergeant

Scott Baker, 445 MXS
 Richard Burkheiser, 445 MXS
 William Fleming, 445 ASTS
 Chirron Hartpence, 445 ASTS
 Jeffery Hurtt, 445 AMXS
 Damon Lee, 445 SVF
 Corey Reid, 445 MXS



Senior Master Sergeant

Steven Beyer, 445 LRS
 Edgar Collingwood, 445 MXS
 Dale Iles, 445 MXS



Chief Master Sergeant

Robert Bowen, 445 MXS



First Lieutenant

Francis Saul III, 89 AS



Captain

Jacqueline Fleming, 89 AS



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Charlie Miller

Senior Master Sgt. John Wheeler, 89th Airlift Wing, with his new wife, Nicola. The couple was married in a special ceremony aboard the "Hanoi Taxi" May 5, 2006.

News Briefs

Memorial Day begins 101 days of summer

May 29, Memorial Day week-end, is the beginning of the traditional 101 Days of Summer Campaign.



The Air Force suffers the greatest loss of personnel due to off-duty mishaps during this period.

The Air Force Safety Center's web address for 101 Days of Summer Information is at <http://afsafety.af.mil/seg/101Days/101Days.shtml>

Mishap prevention is the key to having a safe summer. Be sure to use risk assessment techniques before embarking upon your summer adventure.

445th Annual Golf Scramble

When: Friday, June 16
0900 Shotgun Start

Where:
Sugar Isle
Golf Course
New
Carlisle,
Ohio

Cost: \$200.00 per team
includes food and drink

For more information:
Contact Senior Master
Sgt. John Gram at 257-
3434 or Master Sgt. Tim
Emberton at 257-0389.



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Team 177 keeps story of "Hanoi Taxi" alive

By Senior Airman Martin
Moleski, 445th AW/PA

It took only a small sticker on the flight engineer panel that read "Hanoi Taxi" to spark intrigue in the mind of Master Sgt. Henry Harlow. When the 445th first received the C-141 at Rickenbacker Air National Guard Base over 10 years ago, nobody knew the history that accompanied tail number 66-0177. Along with Sergeant Harlow, Senior Master Sgt. David Dillon, Master Sgt. Jeff Wittman and former member Tech. Sgt. Susan Denlinger, formed Team 177, and devoted their time to telling the story of "The Hanoi Taxi."

Sergeant Harlow, the senior advisor of Team 177, said Air Force historians told his team they had inherited the first aircraft to bring Vietnam POWs home in "Operation Homecoming." From that point on, our goal was to preserve, enlighten and educate people on what the plane did during the repatriation flights.

Over the next 10 years, Team 177 added photographs to the inside of the plane, commemorative plates listing the names of crewmembers and manifests of who was on the plane. Sergeant Harlow said people began coming to him for information because he had taken the time to research the plane correctly.

"If we were going to tell people what the POWs went through, we needed to get it right," Sergeant Harlow said.

While the Air Force paid for the paint job that returned the plane to its



U.S. Air Force photo by TSgt Rick Sforza, 4th Combat Camera

Master Sgt. Henry Harlow, 445th Maintenance Operations Flight, says goodbye before marshaling the "Hanoi Taxi" out for its final flight May 6.

original white and gray theme, everything else added to the plane was purchased by "Team 177," Sergeant Harlow said.

As the last operational C-141 in the Air Force, the "Hanoi Taxi" was retired to the National Museum of the United States Air Force May 6. But before marshaling the aircraft out for its final flight to the museum, Sergeant Harlow's dedication, devotion and loyalty to the aircraft was captured in the above photo. With his head lowered and hand resting on the crew door, Sergeant Harlow was able to say goodbye to the "Hanoi Taxi" and his years of hard work.

"I told people when I closed the door, it'd be awhile," Sergeant Harlow said. "That was the only time I could say goodbye."

Because of Harlow and Team 177, the story of the "Hanoi Taxi" will forever be enshrined, not only in the museum, but in the hearts of all who now know the legacy of this historic aircraft.

